

**TESTIMONY OF**

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**Regarding**

**Manpower, Infrastructure and U.S. Customs and Border Protection  
Resources  
at the Blue Water Bridge  
between Port Huron, MI, U.S.A and Sarnia/Point Edward, ON, CDA**

**Before the**

**House Committee on Homeland Security  
Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security**

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Washington DC**

## **Introduction**

Thank you, Chairwoman Miller, Ranking Member Cuellar, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee. It is a pleasure to be invited and appear before you today to discuss issues with respect to manpower, infrastructure and the allocation of Customs and Border Protection (CBP) resources at the Blue Water Bridge Port of Entry, between the State of Michigan, U.S.A. and the Province of Ontario, Canada.

## **Overview of the Blue Water Bridge Gateway**

Ownership and operation of The Blue Water Bridge (BWB) is shared by two independent entities, the Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) and Blue Water Bridge Canada (BWBC). BWBC is a Canadian Federal Crown Corporation which operates at arms length from the Government of Canada. BWBC owns and operates the Canadian portions of the twin bridges connecting Sarnia, Ontario and Port Huron Michigan. MDOT operates the U.S. portions of the twin bridges. BWBC is a totally self-funded entity, receiving no appropriations from the Government of Canada. BWBC is governed by a board of directors and reports to the Parliament of Canada through the most senior elected official, the Minister, of the Department of Transportation. Our mission is “To make our customers’ gateway experience safe, efficient and enjoyable.”

The BWB provides a critical transportation link for both the United States and Canada. It is the second busiest commercial truck crossing on the U.S./Canada border and the most active livestock entry point between our two nations. It ranks third overall when including passenger vehicle traffic. The crossing accommodates approximately 15 percent of all surface transportation trade between our two countries. Approximately 25 percent of the commercial traffic is related to the auto industry, which is heavily reliant on predictable crossing times for its just-in-time components delivery systems. The bridge’s geographic location, supported by direct highway access makes this a crossing of choice for shipments headed into the states of Michigan and Illinois and those in the southern and western regions. Commercial dangerous goods and hazardous materials also cross this facility on a regular basis.

The crossing is extremely important to the local communities on both sides of the border, whose residents cross frequently to work and for visits with family and friends, as well as for shopping and recreational purposes. The recent strength of the Canadian dollar and the improving Canadian economy have contributed to a large increase in the number of Canadian visitors to the U.S., which has contributed to the local economic recovery efforts of Port Huron, neighboring St. Clair Township and the State of Michigan.

## **Attributes of an Efficient Border Crossing**

1. For a border crossing to work safely and efficiently, we believe that there are six (6) key components that must be considered. They are: Integrated highway approaches, as well as local access, to the border crossing itself
2. Appropriated sized and configured plazas, including sufficient infrastructure and inspection facilities for customs and immigration functions
3. Suitable conveyance capacity of the bridge structure and lanes

4. Modern technology services and support systems
5. Appropriate staffing levels at the primary inspection lanes
6. Operational partnerships involving all primary stakeholders

At the BWB, many positive steps have been or are being taken to address these issues and I would like to provide some examples. We at the BWB have formed strong partnerships with CBP, its Canadian counterpart, the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) and with MDOT, in order to make this crossing the best and most secure that it can be. In fact, we consider ourselves collectively as the BWB “team.” I acknowledge Chris Perry, Director of Field Operations, CBP/Detroit, CBP Port Huron Port Director Dave Dusellier and Mike Szuch, MDOT General Manager at the BWB, for their efforts and strong commitment to this approach and the shared objectives of our team. The BWB team has worked together diligently to develop practical and effective protocols for maximizing the use of the restrictive and aging infrastructure, primarily the U.S. plaza and Primary Inspection Lanes (PILs) for CBP. Traffic and lane management during peak volumes ensures that both commercial and passenger vehicle traffic move safely and efficiently, with border security maintained. We will meet within the month for our annual pre- summer planning session, in order to prepare for the busy summer traffic season ahead. Our four agencies, along with local law enforcement and emergency responders will discuss a coordinated approach to traffic control, maintenance, construction, emergency preparedness and other activities that could affect the BWB and surrounding area. Common strategies and protocols are maintained and routinely updated, in an effort to mitigate any potential concerns and threats. In shared initiatives regarding public awareness, information and education, CBP and CBSA officers have assisted BWBC at events in local shopping malls and other public forums to promote the NEXUS and FAST programs, because these programs make the border crossing safer, more efficient and enjoyable. BWBC alone has invested over \$100,000 in marketing and promoting the trusted traveler initiatives, as an effective means of promoting a more secure and efficient border crossing.

CBP staffing is not an issue at the present time. However, the summer of 2007 serves as a reminder of what can occur when staffing levels are not adequate. Long delays, in excess of one (1) hour heading into to the U.S. particularly during the summer months were experienced virtually every day at the BWB. In fact during the entire 2007 calendar year, there were 151 days where delays of one hour or more occurred. We appreciate the efforts of Congresswoman Miller for her efforts in resolving that crisis. The following year that number was reduced to 32. In calendar 2010 the number rose to 37. See Appendix “B”. We also appreciate Assistant Commissioner Tom Winkowski who formed a Dwell Time Task Force of which I continue to be a member, along with other border operators and stakeholders. The taskforce has been successful in developing a coordinated approach to facilitating legitimate trade and travel, while enabling CBP to continue to fulfill its mission.

Continuing on the positive efforts, we are pleased to see that the reconstruction of Interstate I-94 and I-69, which serve as approaches to the BWB on the U.S. side, is underway. This \$90-million project, including the reconstruction of the Black River

Bridge, is supported by a \$30-million TIGER grant and will greatly improve the safety and efficiency of local and Canada-bound traffic. A similar reconstruction of the Highway 402 approach to the BWB plaza on the Canadian side is also underway and scheduled to be completed in 2012.

BWBC has completed the first phase of its \$110-million Canadian Plaza Improvement Plan. In June, a new \$60-million facility, including seven (7) new commercial PILs for CBSA, will open. The facility, accredited as a [Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design building](#), will house the bridge contingents of CBSA, and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, along with several customs brokerage firms and our BWBC administration. The structure is an integral part of our ongoing plans to further improve the safety, security and efficiency of the Canadian Plaza during the coming decades.

These many positive efforts are being put forth not only because we are dedicated to maintaining a safe, secure and efficient border crossing, but also out of necessity. The attachment I have provided to you (Appendix B), clearly points to the inadequacies of the present U.S. Plaza infrastructure, particularly regarding the current number of (PILs) for CBP, which are woefully insufficient considering current and projected traffic needs, particularly when compared to facilities provided at the other major land ports of entry (LPOE) along the U.S./Canada border. The 2009 figures I have compiled demonstrate that the BWB processes more vehicles per PIL than any other border crossing. In spite of all our efforts described earlier, delays are very common for U.S.-bound traffic, particularly during the busy summer months. These delays have serious, adverse economic consequences of local, regional, national and international concern. Further, they negatively affect our shared environment, as hundreds of vehicles sit idling in long queues.

### **Current Infrastructure Issues**

In May, 2009, the United States Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), MDOT, CBP and the General Services Administration (GSA) achieved a Record of Decision to proceed with a \$583-million project to expand the U.S. LPOE and the connecting I-94/I-69 freeways. The proposed expansion project would increase the existing customs and toll plaza from 18 acres to 56 acres. The project would also lower the elevated plaza to grade, add seven (7) more PILs and provide CBP appropriate space dedicated to secondary inspection areas for both commercial and passenger vehicles. This was a critical consideration, as additional space is needed to improve security associated with the screening of commercial vehicles at the BWB LPOE. Currently, there is no place on the existing LPOE in which to unload and inspect the contents of a commercial vehicle – this at the second busiest commercial crossing on the northern border. To unload a commercial vehicle, CBP officers are forced to escort the un-inspected vehicle through the Port Huron community to an off-site inspection facility. This procedure introduces increased security risks and is an inefficient use of the limited CBP staff at the existing LPOE, resulting in increased delays for legitimate shipments delivery goods into the U.S. The proposed BWB LPOE project will correct this existing deficiency and is anticipated to reduce crossing delays coming into the U.S. from an existing average of 28 minutes to a proposed average delay time of 3 minutes.

Citing funding limitations, officials from the CBP, the FHWA, the GSA and MDOT announced that their BWB Plaza Expansion Project will be scaled back.

The estimated construction cost of the lower-cost alternative for the planned, expansion of the U.S. Plaza is \$110 million.

Before design and construction can begin, CBP must secure funding in the 2013 appropriations budget. At this time, CBP has indicated it will be ready to commence design in 2013, pending the availability of resources. As a consequence, construction of the much-needed plaza expansion project is not expected to begin until 2015, at the earliest.

Although the plaza design, as currently approved, will resolve some of the present inadequacies, including the addition of 12 new commercial PILs, the scaled-down version does not address recommendations addressed by the originally approved plan, which centers on the specific purpose and need for the plaza redesign upon which the project was initiated. In particular, no accommodations have been made for outbound inspection facilities. The existing plaza that will remain a part of the latest design is elevated some 26 feet above ground level, supported by a platform over 60 years old, with a major thoroughfare traversing under it. In this latest scaled-down version, the connectivity to I-94 and I-69 is not properly achieved, as per the originally approved plan. Given the long-standing importance of the BWB trade corridor, combined with the most recent bi-lateral initiative of President Obama and Canadian Prime Minister Harper – Beyond the Border: A Shared Vision for Perimeter Security and Economic Competitiveness, we can assure you that the need for improved, secure facilities at BWB, which had been effectively addressed by the originally approved plaza design, has not diminished. In fact, the need for further essential improvements will remain, despite the implementation of the scaled-down alternative plan. In either scenario, an increase in the number of PILs will require the appropriate CBP resources to staff the booths, when required.

As construction for the new plaza is not likely to be completed until 2017, or beyond, the BWB must make some **interim** improvements to help facilitate the secure and efficient movement of legitimate trade and travel that is currently being hampered by the lack of PILs. In November, 2010, a proposal originally put forth by the CBP Detroit Field Office and subsequently discussed with BWBC and MDOT, was submitted to CBP Headquarters, in Washington. The proposal called for the construction of 4 “staggered PIL booths” and 3 “stacked PIL booths,” which would add significant capacity to this crossing, as required. Realizing the tremendous benefits of this proposal and acknowledging tight budgetary constraints in CBP, the BWBC Board of Directors has approved financial assistance, in order to move this proposal forward, so that the new booths would be functional by summer 2011. As of March 26, 2011, one conference call to move the initiative towards reality has taken place and the project continues to be “studied.” To ensure the project progresses, BWBC offered on January 27, 2011, to supply up to seven (7) new PIL booths, already completely fabricated and ready for delivery, to CBP as one part of BWBC’s contribution to the project. We are disappointed that this proposal has not been given the support it truly deserves, considering the

significance of this border crossing to the economies of both nations and the associated challenges we continue to face. I understand that millions of dollars have been invested at much smaller ports on the U.S./Canada border, while a relatively minor investment at BWB could reap great benefits.

**Conclusion**

Chairwoman Miller, Ranking Member Cuellar, and members of the Subcommittee, in short, we do the best with what we have, it is what we have that is the issue. Thank you for this opportunity to testify about some of the positive work that is taking place at the Blue Water Bridge and some of the real challenges – and opportunities – before us. I can assure you that the BWB team will continue to ensure that this gateway is safe, secure, efficient and enjoyable for all of its law-abiding travelers. I look forward to answering any questions you may have at this time.